Digital Art and the Tunisian Revolution: Aesthetics of Contingency in Oussema Troudi's *Deux minutes de Tunis*

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The revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that began to sweep across numerous Arab countries in December 2010 shocked the world. In this context of radical transformation, of the explosion of enduring political frameworks or of brutal repression and humanitarian disaster, people have struggled to understand the revolutions, and to encourage alternative, nuanced visions of them. The production of art is vital to this process. How does art evoke the idea of revolution? How does this art invent new visual languages? This article addresses these questions in relation to the specific context of the Tunisian Revolution of January 2011. It gives particular attention to innovative uses of video online, focusing on Oussema Troudi's *Deux minutes de Tunis* (2011).1 The Tunisian Revolution – like other revolutions in diverse modern historical contexts – has often tended to be articulated, internally and externally, in black and white terms of success or failure, liberation or constraint, for or against, friend or enemy. The complex range of perspectives in Tunisia has, at times, been reduced to binary perceptions of secularism and religion or, more extremely, a 'Western' notion of democracy and a radical version of Islamism.2 Troudi's work exceeds simplistic narratives of the Revolution. Instead, it points to the uncertainties that followed and poses questions as to the future of Tunisia. It does so by exploring the space of the Revolution in ways that allow contingent elements to enter the work and partly to determine its shape. *Deux minutes de Tunis* is reminiscent of enduring means of using video or

photography to present urban or rural landscapes in alternative ways, while it signals new directions in the imaging of space between control and contingency.

Oussema Troudi's *Deux minutes de Tunis* is composed of 51 two-minute videos, as presented on YouTube (two further videos and two 'hors-série' appear on the Facebook page dedicated to the work). The videos were filmed in Tunis, primarily during the period of the sit-in that took place at the central Place de la Kasbah for one week beginning on 20 February 2011. Protesters demanded the resignation of Interim Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, who had been a member of the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD) led by Ben Ali, who had been deposed on 14 January 2011. However, in Troudi's videos we do not see the demonstrations. The legs and feet are usually all we see of the protesters. In many of the videos we can hear their chants, whistles and cries, including the repeated imperative, 'dégage!' (clear off!), but the camera focuses on the margins, capturing the area behind the protesters' camp, the passages to and from the Square, or the surrounding streets. A number of videos are shot further afield in the district of El Menzah or along the Metro line between the centre of Tunis and Cité El Khadra, or at the beach at La Marsa. In these videos the demonstrations can no longer be heard. Only the title shots, which, on every video, supply the date, time and location of filming, allow us to identify these fragments. One way in which *Deux minutes de Tunis* incorporates contingency is by filming in the peripatetic mode. The footage in a number of videos depends partly on the speed and routes of the transport adopted. In other videos the artist is still; his displacement is implicit in the footage of multiple sites. The artist chooses the sites of his two-minute 'stops' as he moves through the city and beyond with his hand-held camera; he films, as he states, 'presque sans préméditation' (Troudi).

The peripatetic mode resonates with the situationist practice of the *dérive*: '[literally, "drifting"], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances […] In a dérive one or

more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there' (Guy Debord, trans. Ken Knabb). Forms of *dérive* can be found in the work of a wide range of artists, including John Miller, Matthew Buckingham and Sophie Calle.3 Troudi's work, however, uses this technique specifically to create an alternative vision of Tunis and the Revolution. In doing so, it exceeds Debord's definition of the *dérive*. It develops variations on this technique, which sometimes involve deceleration rather than 'rapid passage', and which are employed beyond the urban environment. This work combines such variations with additional means of generating contingency, which depend on the artist's environment, means of transport, medium and formats for display. Paradoxically, it is precisely by imposing certain parameters on the work that chance is incorporated. The work emerges from a balance between control and contingency, which echoes the co-existence, in circumstances of revolution, of constraint and liberation, certainty and uncertainty. Of the *dérive*, Debord stated: '[c]hance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a dérive point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.' (Debord). Chance is also diminished in Troudi's work, but particularly by exploring specific spaces and historical moments of the Revolution. At the same time, chance is heightened through alternative practices.

The ambivalence between control and contingency is extended to the spectators. They are immersed by sensorial elements, such as the sounds of chanting or the evening call to prayer or the haptic surfaces of rippling water or tiled pavements, but their visual knowledge is inhibited. This work exploring space resonates to some extent with an argument advanced by Amelia Jones in relation to works of art portraying the body. Jones shows that certain images of the body immerse the spectator while simultaneously distancing them. As she

states, these images 'retain rather than attempting to resolve or disavow [the] tension between the subjective and objective worlds' (370). Yet the tension in Troudi's work is produced specifically through the use of medial features to restrict vision, such as framing, camera angle or level of focus. It is also heightened by cultural, including linguistic, elements. The work encourages understanding while protecting Opacity, in Edouard Glissant's sense of irreducible, heterogeneous 'otherness' that cannot be absorbed and domesticated or defined and located 'outside' (203–09). The 'other' (and the extent to which the 'self' is implicated in it), though, will shift, depending on the spectator. The sounds of Tunisian Arabic, and occasionally shots of written Arabic, for example, will resonate differently for different viewers. The spectators – viewing with diverse backgrounds and in locations within and beyond Tunisia – will have uneven experiences of the work.

An ambivalent dynamic between stability and instability is central to a still emerging corpus of responses to the Tunisian Revolution in art across diverse media, from sculpture, installation, performance and graffiti to drawing, painting, photography and video. By exploring this tension such artwork exceeds 'icons of revolutionary exoticism' (Gasteli), which have been used in contexts including the French Revolution and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's 'Revolution', as I have discussed elsewhere (Shilton 2013; 2014). In some works this dynamic is produced through the use of contingent elements – particularly organic, often perishable materials. This can be seen, for example, in Hela Lamine's scans of a portrait of Ben Ali made in a decaying mixture of bread and water (*Nous ne mangerons plus de ce pain-là*, 2011). Troudi's *Deux minutes de Tunis* demonstrates alternative aesthetics of contingency.

Troudi's work is part of an emerging corpus of artwork exploring urban and often rural spaces through film or photography. In its investigation of spaces that usually exist in the *hors champ*, beyond the frame of the image, Troudi's work resonates with works including Aïcha Filali's photographic series, *L'Angle mort*, which produces images of

ordinary people in the streets of Tunis from behind (2010-12). Patricia Triki photographs the makeshift barriers that remain dotted across empty streets as protection against pillaging after the beginning of the Revolution (see her *Checkpoint* series, 2011). While in these works the journey linking these images together can only be imagined, Mouna Karray's *Live* makes explicit use of the peripatetic mode (2012). In this work, Tunis, and for a short time the sit-in at the Place de la Kasbah, are evoked in the soundtrack of a conversation between a taxi driver and his passenger as they observe changes on the streets of the capital. Karray's exploration of space through sound offers an alternative to the iconic propagandist images of Ben Ali that we see on the screen. The practice of filming and travelling is used in contrasting revolutionary contexts: in Azza Hamwi's *A Day and a Button* (2015) a hidden camera and the recurrence of checkpoints highlight the restrictions on circulating in Damascus. In its alternative presentation of space, Troudi's work can also be situated in relation to online video recordings of prior interventions in urban and rural areas of Tunisia, such as graffiti by artists including Ahl Al Kahf and El Seed and collaborations such as JR's *Inside Out Project*.4 In such artwork marginal spaces are exposed or central spaces are reconfigured and reclaimed. In many works the city's plan and architectural landmarks, which once embodied the power of Ben Ali's regime, are selectively presented, framed, rearranged and edited. Recognisable fragments of the city appear alongside marginal, often unidentifiable urban spaces or rural landscapes. In its reordering of space – and indeed its de-privileging of the visual, which is central to iconic and enduring exoticist imaging – this work resonates with Rancière's view that art can challenge an anti-democratic social order through its re-'distribution of the sensible' (12-13). This work is not an example of activism in the conventional sense of direct action and clear alignment with one particular side. However, in finding – and often distributing online – new means of visualising Tunisia and the Revolution

between clichés and extremes, it allows for alternative voices and visions, and thereby contributes indirectly to the work of the Revolution.

Troudi's exploration of alternative spaces is reminiscent of earlier twenty-first-century video and photography visualising Tunisia and, indeed, the neighbouring countries of Algeria and Morocco. These works similarly exceed Debord's *dérive*. In *Postcards from Tunisia* (begun in 2010), for example, Wassim Ghozlani photographs everyday scenes in peripheral rural spaces to avoid external and internal utopian images of Tunisia. Ismaïl Bahri's *Orientations* (2010) explores the streets of Tunis by filming the images reflected precariously in a cup of ink, which he holds while he walks. This work combines the peripatetic mode with a shifting organic substance. Katia Kameli films while travelling at various speeds and on different modes of transport to generate contingent views of Algiers and its surrounding areas in *Bledi, a possible scenario* (2004).5 In the contexts of censorship in pre-Revolutionary Tunisia, and in Algeria and Morocco which did not experience revolutions in 2011, art investigating peripheral spaces and stories subtly gestures towards alternative ways of thinking.6 This transnational corpus anticipates aesthetics of Revolution in Tunisia.7 Yet, as I show in this article, *Deux minutes de Tunis* adapts and develops aesthetics reminiscent of earlier artwork on Maghrebi spaces to the terrain and specific moments of the Tunisian Revolution, and to emerging online formats for display. Troudi's work also extends the shifting balance between control and contingency from the stage of production to that of reception. In such ways, I argue, this work conveys Tunisia as shifting and plural, and involves diversely located spectators in the process of rethinking the on-going Revolution.

Adaptations: Filming the Tunisian Revolution between Icons and Micro-Visions

In Oussema Troudi's work it is the constraints imposed on form that allow contingent elements, paradoxically, to shape his representation of the capital city, as I have suggested. Troudi imposes a number of parameters on his work. He films each video for the specific time period of two minutes. He produces unedited 'real-time' footage, with only one exception: the final video of the collection (as displayed on YouTube) – a night view of the city's Hôpital Militaire – shifts to a close-up of the Tunisian flag, as if to encourage contemplation of the nation's uncertain future following the Revolution. In each video Troudi adopts a single viewpoint and a restricted perspective, due to the choice of site, the framing of the image and/or the camera angle adopted. The camera remains almost static, shaking just enough to indicate the artist's presence and the relative spontaneity of his filming.

Even when filming at the centre of the action, the artist frequently adopts a low or high angle. In *Deux minutes de Tunis*, *26* the camera captures only the top corner of a building, along with a wide expanse of sky, which is traversed by a helicopter (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ex4fDBlUZRg). Although spatially and temporally restricted, the vision of nightfall, along with the persistent sound of whistling, conveys the demonstrators' endurance and commitment. More frequently, a high-angle perspective is adopted, focusing on the muddy ground (*15*), puddles dotted with litter (*35*), or the ashes of a fire strewn with orange peel (*25*). These apparently banal signs of life behind, alongside or after the iconic event tell us of the everyday activities of the demonstrators, the cold wet weather and, once more, the endurance and strength of the resistance of ordinary people. Certain videos adopt a level angle, but do so to focus on an expanse of mud and a wall on which we see the legs and feet of demonstrators; we appear to be *behind* the icon (*7*; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YKXCjKd_ZU). Alternatively, the vision we would have of the demonstrations is obscured or distorted by an everyday object, such as a popcorn cooker (*13*). Troudi provides us with sensorial impressions, rather than visual or verbal

information such as we would gain from reportage. Media images of the Revolution often tend to produce all-encompassing panoramic or aerial views of the masses, or close-ups of shouting demonstrators with fist or flag held high. Troudi's work, by contrast, offers alternative micro-visions, which emerge *between* the artist and the city or its people. The work 'stars' 'Tunis, et des passants au hasard' (Troudi). By including ordinary people works such as *Deux minutes de Tunis* literally involve those who, according to Rancière, do not 'have a part' (12).

Troudi's constrained viewpoints inhibit the making of icons of revolutionary exoticism. Certain videos also appear to allude to enduring colonial exoticist visions of Tunisia, and to undermine them. Exoticist images are undermined emphatically in videos that appear to allude ironically to the clichés perpetuated by postcards of the country. In *Deux minutes de Tunis, 36,* filmed at a distance from the sit-in, a low-angle shot focuses on the top of a palm tree against a predominantly blue sky. The image appears to be cropped in a way that excludes any detail that would allow the spectator to contextualize it. The visually tranquil and timeless scene is disrupted, however, by the discrepant distant sound coming from the historic demonstration at the Place de la Kasbah. The sense of sight is shown to be unreliable. A more subtle anti-exoticist discourse can be discerned in the dystopian images of rubbish, dirt, decay and dysfunction. An empty fountain (*4*), or stagnant pools of water holding litter (*35*), can be seen as metaphors for the government's perceived incapacity to meet the demands of the Revolution. Such videos hint silently at the reasons behind the demonstrations we can hear.

Troudi's strategies for producing anti-exoticist micro-visions are reminiscent of those employed in pre-2011 photographic series by artists such as Wassim Ghozlani and Yto Barrada. Ghozlani's *Postcards of Tunisia* (2010-11) incorporates elements which would usually be excluded from postcards. These include the everyday (in scenes such as that of a

man on a mobile phone or a man working at a mechoui stand) and the dystopian (in images of a cloudy sky or a factory emitting smoke). Barrada frequently devotes a large part of her images to the ground, capturing wild flowers or grass, everyday objects, or peoples' feet, in *Iris Tingitana* (2007).8 The Iris Tingitana, a flower specific to the region, becomes, in Barrada's images, a symbol of resistance to the eradication of local particularities through rapid economic development. Whereas micro-visions in these works suggest an alternative to the touristic clichés circulated both externally and internally, in work exploring the Tunisian Revolution they are anchored in relation to this new context. Troudi's work engages directly with, and contests, iconic sights and sites of the nation and the Revolution. Micro-visions, in *Deux minutes de Tunis,* produce a tension between the iconic and the non-iconic, which makes spectators acutely aware of a specific space and moment while hiding it from their view. Troudi's video from 'behind' the icon is reminiscent of a post-2011 version of Filali's photographic *L'Angle mort*, which included a back view of a man waving the Tunisian flag (*Rosige Zukunft*, 2013, Stuttgart). Troudi's strategy to film through everyday objects that obscure the site of the sit-in finds a striking parallel in Halim Karabibène's single video displaying the same event and location, also through a popcorn cooker (*Popcorn Revolution*, 25 February 2011) (In Karabibène's video the pressure cooker becomes a metaphor of the Revolution). The dynamic between control and contingency is, thus, used for a particular purpose. This tension is heightened through the development of alternative practices. Troudi's work adapts enduring strategies, or combines them in new ways, exceeding icons of the Tunisian Revolution and iconic languages of revolution more widely.

Variations: Environment, Medium, and Mode of Travel

Dramatically high- or low-angle viewpoints are combined, at times, with a focus on shifting organic elements to destabilise important architectural landmarks of Tunis. A high-angle viewpoint comes together with the unpredictable movements of water in *Deux minutes de Tunis, 17* (Figure 1; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8_nzQH9miE). The Bab al Bahr, an imposing gateway and defining feature of the capital, is reflected in the pool created by the fountains before it. Usually a towering symbol of strength, authority and cohesive identity, this former embodiment of the power of Ben Ali's regime is lowered to ground level. The edges of the rigid stone structure are soft and wavering, their hesitations dependent on the contingent movements of falling, splashing water. This video both resists dictatorial authority – past and present – and points to the uncertainty of Tunisia's identity and future by using an organic element that obeys its own natural laws. The artist selects the camera angle and films for the requisite two minutes, while allowing a shifting, fluid substance to determine the remainder of the work. The footage is reminiscent of the uneven, flickering images of architecture – and, at one point, the Tunisian flag – which are generated by Bahri's peripatetic journey with a cup of ink in 2010. The (re-)emergence of an alternative source of power and potential constraint is perhaps alluded to, but also questioned, in the video of a minaret through a curved grid of windows blurred by dirt (*18*). The use of an organic substance to rework icons of the Revolution extends beyond this corpus of works depicting space, as I have suggested in relation to Hela Lamine's remaking of a portrait of Ben Ali in a decaying mixture of bread and water. The practice can also be found in Meriem Bouderbala's later evocation of political uncertainty through photographs of the Tunisian flag drifting in a pond (*Flag Nymphéas*, 2012). However, elsewhere in *Deux minutes de Tunis*, the unpredictable effects of natural elements are combined with those produced by low-resolution filming.

A comparable balance between control and contingency can be found in a low-angle view of a fragment of the Palais du Gouvernement in *Deux minutes de Tunis, 9* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cohBQ28m7Ok). It is filmed through a thick transparent covering, which appears to be a part of the demonstrators' camp. The power and authority of the building and flag – and of iconic images of the Revolution – appear to be called into question not only by the material's blurring of the structure's clean lines and the flag's distinctive symbols but also by the effects produced by its billowing in the wind. The material arbitrarily folds, creases and catches the sunlight as it rises and falls, alternately concealing and revealing the clock tower and flag. Like the video of the Bab Al Bahr, this fragment resists the iconic by incorporating contingent organic elements during the process of production; that is, the process of uninterrupted filming in real time. In addition, at a moment when the covering is lifted by the wind, the film is, ironically, interrupted by a glitch. The composition is briefly 'scratched' by a vertical line. The formal effects of low-resolution filming complement the exposure of decay and dysfunction through content.9 In Troudi's work, glitch – like the shaking hand-held camera – is a reminder of his spontaneous, peripatetic mode of filming. In this video, the glitch is fleeting, and presumably unintended, and yet the contingent effects of technology and nature coalesce here to produce an aesthetic with which to resist iconic languages.

A powerful antidote to exoticist images – including romanticising sights of revolution – is provided by the sustained focus, in certain videos, of the surfaces of pavements or walls or, further afield, of foaming waves. Indeed, while certain objects or scenes can be read as metaphors for governmental deliberations or for the strength of the people's resistance, other micro-visions seem to refer only to themselves. Even those videos capturing the edge of the demonstration or the feet of demonstrators devote a large portion of the composition to the detail of the ground or a wall (see, for example, *5*, *12* and *41*). They privilege materiality over

metaphor. The videos produced at a distance from the demonstrations lack visual or auditory elements that would allow the spectator to locate them in Tunisia (*22* and *23*). These sustained micro-visions are reminiscent of those periods in travel literature when the journey stops – at least, in a literal sense – and the traveller explores a particular space in depth. Michael Cronin has referred to this mode as 'vertical travel', which he describes as 'temporary dwelling in a location for a period of time where the traveller begins to travel down into the particulars of place either in space […] or in time' (19). These periods of deceleration and vertical travel tend to produce images of everyday scenes and activities or to convey an extreme close-up, exploring the texture of a surface.10 They contrast with the exoticist panoramas that can be produced when travellers are on the move (travelling 'horizontally') and at a distance from the landscape or people depicted. Troudi's videos are not long periods of 'dwelling'. His moments of stillness nonetheless produce comparable images. However, in *Deux minutes de Tunis* the contingent micro-visions characteristic of vertical travel continue at high speeds.

When wandering on foot the artist allows his choices to be influenced by his environment. When travelling by metro, bus or train, further control is relinquished as the footage depends, in part, on predetermined routes and stops. In a number of videos alternative angles combine with the high speed of a train to produce an almost abstract image. For a part of the historic sit-in, the artist chooses to film in rural or coastal locations far from the demonstrations, which cannot be heard. *Deux minutes de Tunis, 19* and *21* comprise high-angle views of the railway, stones and grass (*19*), or the railway and edge of the platform (*21*), while *20* displays a low-angle view of telegraph wires against the sky (*21*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6p2KDcM4ys). When the train reaches full speed, in all three of these videos, the image tends towards abstraction, the detail of the composition becoming suggestive of lines and colour fields. This effect is enhanced by the pixellation of

the image, which becomes more apparent as the train's speed increases. Here, aesthetics of contingency are produced by low-resolution digital technology and an extreme angle, together with high speed. The tendency towards abstraction is also heightened, in *20* and *21*, by the artist's rotation of the video 90 degrees to the left. These videos are reminiscent of the sustained views of surfaces in some of the footage produced at the demonstrations. Here, the artist travels literally, yet the scene appears hardly to evolve; horizontal and vertical modes of travel can be seen to converge.

Kameli's *Bledi* provides a precedent for vertical travel in video. Yet her exploration of Algiers and its surrounding areas connects this mode only with deceleration. Moreover, by contrast with Troudi's downward views of the feet of passers-by, deceleration in *Bledi* often leads to encounters with people – either spontaneous or planned – in the documentary mode. In addition, while frequently capturing the everyday, Kameli's footage in the vertical mode does not depart from the culturally identifiable. Troudi's sustained shots of visually un-locatable natural scenes are closer to Ghozlani's photographic close-ups of water or the ground in *Postcards from Tunisia*. In Troudi's work exploring the Tunisian Revolution, however, such shots provide a counterpoint to icons.

In videos filmed close to the demonstration, tension between the iconic and the non-iconic is produced through the co-existence of a recognisable architectural fragment and a non-discursive haptic surface (or a blank sky). Alternatively, such tension is generated through a visually marginal or un-locatable space and the unmistakable sound of the Tunisian revolutionary protest. In the videos filmed beyond the urban environment the distance from iconic language is taken to an extreme. In addition to being visually lacking in cultural specificity, the sound of the demonstrations is absent. This renders the footage almost ahistorical. However, the continued use of factual titles confirms the exact location and time of filming: 'TGM – Le Bac. 25 Février 2011. 15h' (*19*) 'TGM –Le Bac. 25 Février 2011.

15h05' (*20*); 'TGM – La Goulette – Le Casino. 25 Février 2011. 15h10' (*21*); 'Marsa Plage. 25 Février 2011. 17h40' (*22*); 'Marsa Plage. 25 Février 2011. 17h50' (*23*). Moreover, these fragments appear alongside the multiple videos in which the demonstrations and familiar chants can be heard, the Tunisian flag can be seen or our attention is drawn to graffiti (*29*), an anti-government cartoon drawing (*31*), or a revolutionary statement handwritten in Arabic (*27*).11 In these ways, spatially and temporally dislocated images are anchored in relation to a specific stage and site of the Revolution. They can, therefore, be seen to create a space for alternative, non-iconic visions. In aesthetics of revolution the specific and the singular co-exist.12 Indeed, the production of the singular depends on the specific.

Control and Contingency from Production to Reception

The ambivalent dynamic between control and contingency, location and dislocation, is extended through the use of online formats for display. *Deux minutes de Tunis* relies partly on the rules governing the layout and mechanisms of search engines and social media platforms chosen by the artist and partly on the uses made of these by the spectators. This representation of Tunis continues to evolve and to differ for each new user – not only because interpretation is always subjective but also because of the multiple possible selections and arrangements of the collection of videos. If the work is searched for by artist and title on Google, and a link to one of the work's videos on YouTube is chosen, a selection of the 51 videos appears jumbled together with media footage – related or unrelated to the Tunisian Revolution. If the work is searched for directly on YouTube, the entire collection appears together, but also in random order. Both formats provide the option to turn off the default 'autoplay' mode, which allows the viewer to select videos and the order of viewing. On Facebook, the mode of viewing is potentially more structured. Spectators following the artist

at the time of the work's production might have watched each video soon after it had been uploaded.13 However, viewing the collection after the event, the videos appear in reverse order. Moreover, on the separate viewing page, to which each video leads, a row of mini-screens allows the spectator to modify that order. In any of these formats, the viewer is not encouraged to watch the work chronologically and, even when the entire collection is available, they are unlikely to watch every video (the number of views confirms this). There is a tension between the assiduous documentation of the location, date and time of each video and the random and selective modes of viewing encouraged by these formats. This doubles the tension, produced at the stage of production, between the anchoring, informative title shots – or other visual, linguistic or auditory markers of cultural specificity – and those peripheral spaces that are evacuated of cultural signifiers. Moreover, the space of Tunis, which is already fragmented and reworked through the spontaneous filming of peripheral spaces or restrictive angles, is subject to further selection, manipulation and re-arrangement at the stage of viewing. Disseminating his work across several and shifting interactive public formats, Troudi highlights emerging challenges and possibilities for video art. *Deux minutes de Tunis* points to new, online means of incorporating chance and to their use for the purposes of resistance and reimagining in, and beyond, the context of the Tunisian Revolution.

Conclusion

Oussama Troudi's *Deux minutes de Tunis* avoids essentialising visions of Tunisia and its Revolution, both from outside and from within, by exploring apparently peripheral spaces and 'blind spots' (to reprise Filali's title). In this respect, it converges with certain earlier work in video and photography exploring Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco. Troudi's work is

reminiscent of such work in allowing contingent elements partly to determine its shape through the use of a static frame and a visually restrictive angle. It resonates with earlier work in video in involving the use of unedited footage in 'real time', and filming in the peripatetic mode at various speeds, including moments of deceleration or 'vertical' travel. However, post-2010 art exploring Tunisia can be seen to adapt such strategies specifically to encourage the re-imagining of sites and sights of the Revolution or its aftermath. In the context of freedom from decades of censorship under Ben Ali and his predecessor, Habib Bourguiba, this art often engages with, and explicitly contests, icons of Tunisia: the national flag, architectural landmarks or central locations of power. Troudi's numerous fragments are anchored in relation to such iconic objects, structures and spaces. They undermine them by shifting between high and low angles, horizontal and vertical travel, high speed and deceleration, and urban and rural spaces. This work adapts enduring strategies, or combines them in innovative ways, to create new means of evoking the idea of revolution, and the Tunisian Revolution in particular. It also develops alternative means of generating contingency by using online formats, such that the picture of Tunisia comes to depend on the parameters of YouTube, Facebook or search engines and the uses the spectator makes of them. Through Troudi's work the spectator is diversely and provisionally involved in the reordering of space.

Troudi produces a complex vision of Tunis between representation and abstraction, metaphor and materiality, the discursive and the sensorial, location and dislocation. This tension ambivalently interpolates the spectator. They are immersed in the work sensorially, which heightens their understanding of the atmosphere at the sit-in and beyond. However, they are simultaneously distanced by the 'gaps' that emerge within and between the videos. Their knowledge of events is limited by restrictions on their vision or by the artist's spatial displacement, and by the shifting presentation of fragments online. They are involved in the

manipulation of these fragments, but aware that their arrangement is one among multiple possibilities. *Deux minutes de Tunis*, like many other works of art exploring the Revolution, is not activist in the conventional sense of promoting a straightforward political message. Instead, this work creates an ambiguous space between politics and poetics, as it engages with the Revolution while encouraging spectators to reshape their memories of it and indeed to imagine alternative futures for Tunisia.

Notes:

1 See: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL62FA876B33FECC73. See also the Facebook page dedicated to this work: https://www.facebook.com/DeuxminutesdeTunis/ (All websites in this article were last accessed in May 2016.)
2 For more on essentialising visions of Tunisia, particularly from abroad, see Jocelyne Dakhlia.
3 A wide range of examples of the *dérive* could be seen at the Palais de Tokyo's exhibition, *Les Dérives de l'imaginaire* (2012-13).
4 For more on graffiti and the Tunisian Revolution, see Dounia Georgeon.
5 See also Bruno Boudjelal's *Jours intranquilles: chroniques algériennes d'un retour (1993-2003)* and Nadia Ferroukhi's *Chroniques algériennes* (2000-present) in photography and, in video, Khaled Benaïssa's *Babel* (2006).
6 As John P. Entelis argues, Algeria was the first country in the Arab world to experience an 'Arab spring', at least two decades earlier, but that democratic moment was rapidly brought to an end by a military coup d'état. On the extent of constitutional reforms in Morocco following the February 20th Movement of 2011, see Driss Maghraoui.
7 Bahri's work is not politically motivated, while his use of the peripatetic mode anticipates the works of Troudi and Karray.
8 See especially her video *The Botanist*, a part of *Iris Tingitana* (2007).
9 Laura U. Marks has drawn attention to the aesthetic effects of what she names 'Arab Glitch', highlighting that low-resolution film is revelatory of conditions on the ground.
10 See, for example, Nicolas Bouvier's *Poisson-Scorpion* (1981).
11 The graffiti in *29*, in Arabic and Roman script, is only partly legible. The main part of the text in *27* can be translated as follows: 'I was shot on 13 January with four bullets and today I protest in the Place de la Kasbah, [literally] looking for martyrdom.' The final expression conveys that although he was shot during the first revolutionary demonstrations he will continue to fight, even if it means dying for the cause. I am very grateful to Maryam Almohammad for translating this handwritten text.
12 I employ the term 'specific' to designate a sensorial or verbal component (of a work of art) that refers to an identifiable cultural space or language, and the term 'singular' to designate an element that exceeds the discursive and the culturally locatable. Peter Hallward uses these terms to distinguish between relational and non-relational modes of individuation.
13 The final video of the work, as presented on Facebook, diverges from the character of the others in its unrestricted reference to a political process. Filmed on 19 October 2011, days before the first post-Revolutionary election, it focuses on two men pasting a poster which reads: 'Bien sûr, je vote!'

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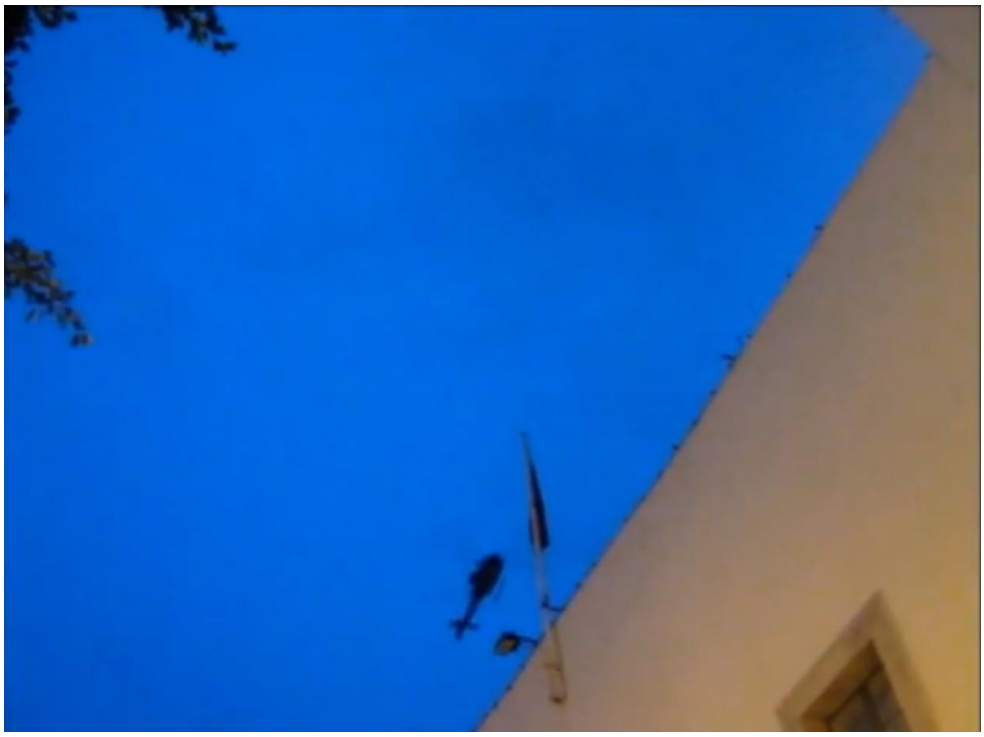
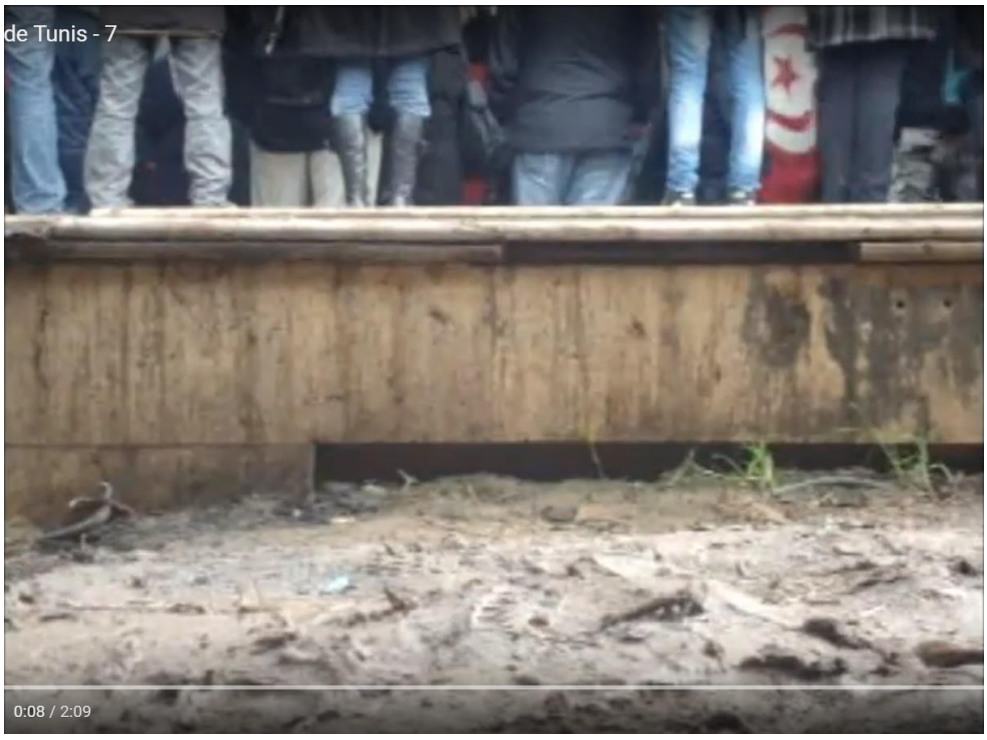
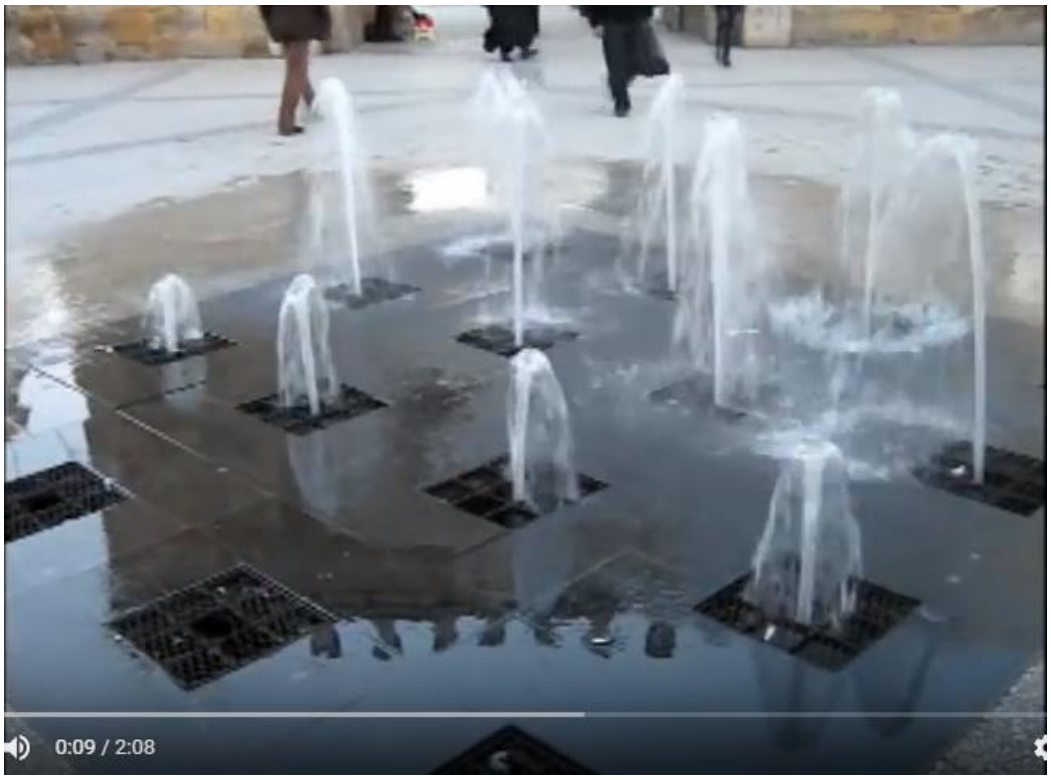


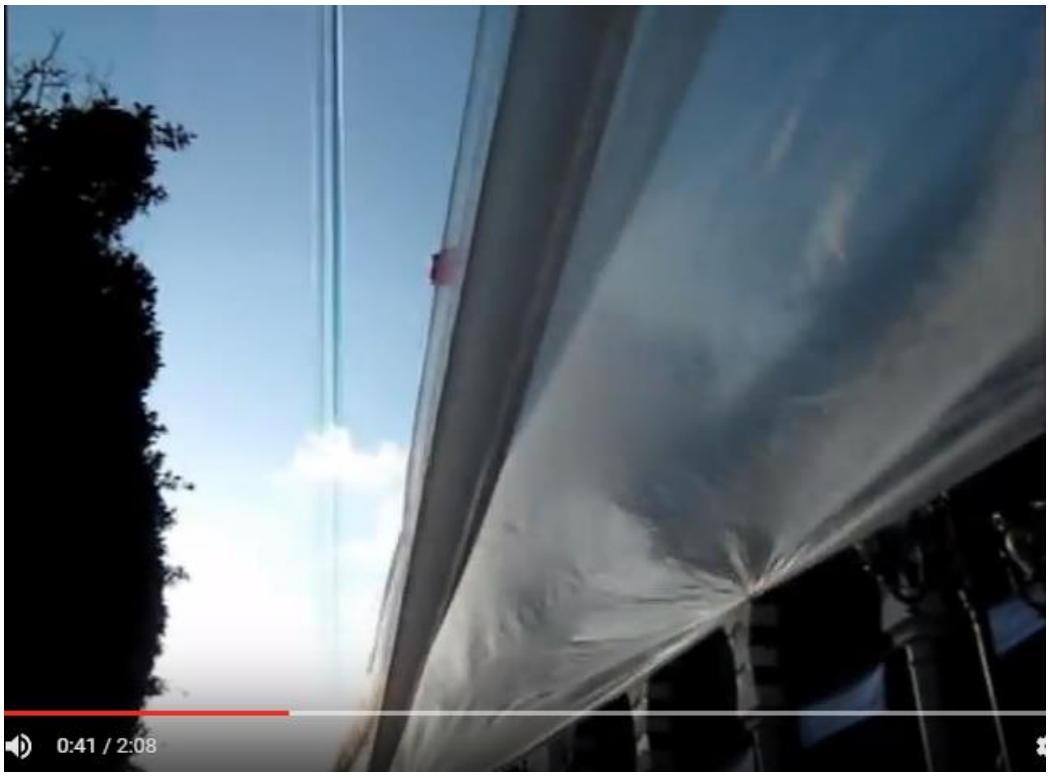
Deux minutes de Tunis, 26. Courtesy of the artist.



Deux minutes de Tunis, 7. Courtesy of the artist.



Deux minutes de Tunis, 17. Courtesy of the artist.



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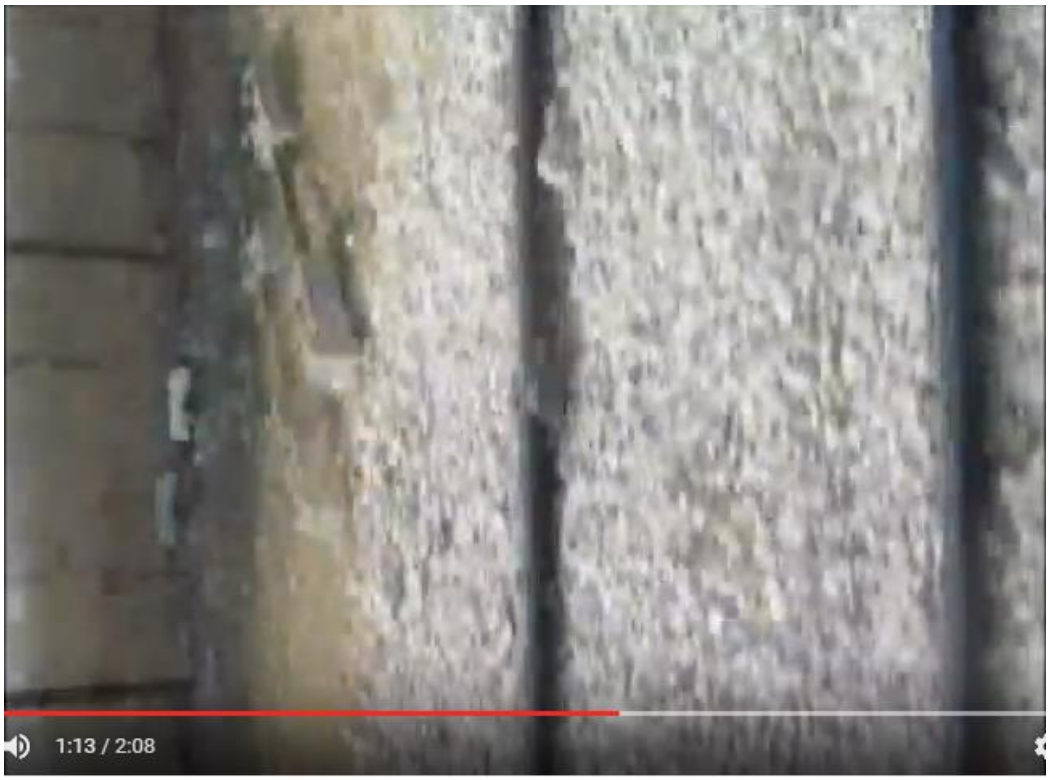

Deux minutes de Tunis, 21. Courtesy of the artist.